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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 004375

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/WE, EUR/SE AND EUR/ERA

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SUBJECT: ITALY'S SUPPORT FOR TURKEY'S EU ACCESSION REMAINS  
STRONG AND UNCONDITIONAL - GREECE/CYPRUS AND FRANCE ARE  
MAIN ROADBLOCKS TO EARLY DATE

REF: STATE 240286

Classified By: POL MINISTER COUNSELOR TOM COUNTRYMAN. REASON: 1.5 (b)(  
d)

1 (C) MFA Turkey/Cyprus Office Director Renato Ricci reiterated to poloff Italy's strong support for a December 17 EU Council decision specifying an unconditional and early date to begin Turkish accession negotiations. While there is an internal government and popular debate within Italy on Turkey's suitability to join the EU, the government's position is firm. Ricci noted especially the right wing coalition partner Lega Nord (Northern League) opposition, but predicted "the Prime Minister will stand his ground" on Turkey. (Comment: There is nothing to suggest that DPM Fini, if appointed FM as expected, would seek to weaken this stance.) Pol Min was also informed that, in an effort to help Turkey's image with the EU population in general, the Italian think tank Institute for Foreign Affairs (IAI) will sponsor a series of seminars bringing together Turkish and European policy makers. The first of these will be on November 24 in Rome.

12. (C) Ricci predicted the two major stumbling blocks between now and December 17 will be Greece/Cyprus and France. "The key to Nicosia is Athens," Ricci said. EU members must insist that Athens uses its overwhelming influence with the government in Nicosia to do the right thing on December 17. Ricci worried that France was a harder and more complicated issue. The internal government debate in Paris and strong popular opinion was pointing towards, at best, an agreement to Turkish accession with strong conditions and long lead time for beginning negotiations. At worst, Ricci warned, Nicosia could join on French coattails to delay outright the decision on accession. "This would be a disaster for relations between Ankara and the West."

13. (C) In response to Poloff's offer of US help, Ricci said that Washington's most valuable contribution would be to use its good relations with Turkey to keep Ankara calm in the run-up to the Council meeting. "No accidental overflights, no inflammatory statements." Ricci said that Ankara should keep a low profile and allow its friends, including Italy, to fight its battles in Brussels. Ricci understood that US-Greek relations, particularly after recognition of "Macedonia," were not as close, but he suggested that the US should use whatever influence it had with Athens to dissuade officials from teaming with any Cypriot effort to derail Turkish accession. As for France, Ricci opined that any US intervention or attempt to persuade would likely backfire. Whatever the US decides to do, Ricci concluded, it should be "focused and quiet."

SEMBLER

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